

**Annual Study Center Review
CIEE Study Center at Ecole Superieure de Direction et de Gestion (ESDG),
Rabat, Morocco
Language and Culture Program
2009**

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Each summer, program directors write a Study Center Review for each CIEE Study Center program commenting on the previous academic year. The program director writes the review based on input from the CIEE Academic Consortium Board members, resident directors, sending institutions, and student evaluations. Each report is made public on the CIEE website at www.ciee.org.

Program Goals

The goals of this program are for students to develop an understanding of contemporary Morocco; to gain insight into Morocco's role in the Arab world and its ties to Europe; and to develop Arabic language skills at the beginning through advanced level. Students with strong French language skills can take elective courses in French, adding to the overall cultural and linguistic experience. In addition to the coursework, the program goals are met through a variety of community engagement and field-based research opportunities.

Based on student and staff feedback, this program met many of its stated goals in 2008-09, particularly those focusing on Moroccan culture. Students on this program were able to gain insight into Morocco's role in the Arab world and learned firsthand about Moroccan culture through the integrated housing and CIEE cultural activities and excursions. While the academic program did offer students Arabic language courses and area studies courses in both English and French, the overall quality of these courses did not meet the expectations of students or CIEE staff. Finally, there were insufficient opportunities for community engagement through volunteer and internship projects.

This was the first year of the new CIEE Language and Culture program, and some of the challenges that occurred in 2008-09 were simply the result of a new program, new staff, and a program that offers courses in three languages. However, there were clearly some significant issues within the academic and co-curricular program components that required CIEE action both during and after the fall 2008 semester. The start to the fall 2008 semester was complicated by the holy month of Ramadan. CIEE staff found it difficult to finalize orientation activities, group excursions, and other cultural events due to the fact that many local faculty, guest lecturers, and other organizations would not commit to dates and details until after Ramadan had ended. CIEE staff have discussed ways to avoid these problems in the future. In addition, a summer renovation project at the local host institution (ESDG) was delayed and was not completed until approximately one month after the start of the semester. The National Library was under renovation until mid-way through the fall semester, adding additional challenges for both staff and students.

Based on student and staff feedback from fall 2008, changes were made to the overall program calendar and specific academic components. Overall, student feedback in spring 2009 was noticeably more positive than feedback from the fall 2008 group, suggesting that many of the changes implemented between semesters were successful. The spring 2009 program had far fewer organizational challenges, and overall feedback on the academic program was more positive.

Despite the challenges mentioned above, students had positive things to say about the host city (Rabat), the cultural activities and excursions organized by CIEE, and the CIEE homestays. The CIEE staff, particularly the Resident Coordinator, received positive feedback in spring 2009, as students indicated that they received good overall support from staff on-site.

In 2009-10, CIEE will make adjustments to the Arabic language courses and hire several new area studies professors in an attempt to make the overall academic program more rewarding for the students. One of the challenges that will be addressed in the upcoming semesters is the "language mix" for this program. While the program requires Arabic language and offers area studies electives in both English and French, the language goals of the students choosing this program are still somewhat unclear. While many are interested in studying Arabic, very few students in the first year of this program had a significant background with Arabic prior to studying abroad in Morocco. Further, only a few students had French skills sufficient for taking French area studies electives. Over the next year, CIEE will work with students more closely to adjust the program's language goals and, hopefully, make the program stronger academically.

New and Noteworthy

The CIEE Rabat Language and Culture Program started in fall 2008. It is based at the Ecole Supérieure de Direction et de Gestion (ESDG) in a quiet, modern neighborhood of Rabat, Morocco. ESDG is a private business and intercultural communication school with approximately 300 students. It is accredited by both the Moroccan and French Ministries of Education. CIEE area studies courses are taught by faculty from ESDG, Université Mohammed V, and Institut Hassan II. The Arabic language courses are taught by language instructors from the Department of Arabic as a Foreign Language at the Université Mohammed V. The CIEE Study Center office is located in ESDG and provides daily support to the program participants. The CIEE resident staff consists of an Academic Director and a Resident Coordinator. The Academic Director is a senior faculty member at ESDG and Institut Hassan II. He has experience leading and coordinating CIEE International Faculty Development Seminars (IFDS) and working with various international exchange programs. The Resident Coordinator is a bi-cultural, dual Moroccan and U.S. citizen who completed her undergraduate and graduate degrees in the U.S. She grew up in the U.S. but spent summers with family in Rabat.

Academic

The CIEE Language and Culture program requires students to enroll in an intensive Moroccan Colloquial Arabic course during the first two weeks of the semester. Students are then required to take a Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) course and the required core course, *Contemporary Moroccan Society and Culture*. Finally, students can choose two elective courses from the various CIEE area studies courses offered in English and French. Students who study with CIEE in Rabat for the academic year can substitute a for-credit internship for one of the elective courses during the second semester.

Arabic Language

Students are required to enroll in Intensive Moroccan Colloquial Arabic during the first two weeks of the program. Students are then required to register for the appropriate level of Modern Standard Arabic for the rest of the semester. In addition, a one-credit elective Moroccan Colloquial Arabic course is offered every semester for those wishing to focus on Darija (local dialect of Arabic).

Fall 2008

Intensive Moroccan Colloquial Arabic
Beginning Modern Standard Arabic I
Beginning Modern Standard Arabic II
Intermediate Modern Standard Arabic I
Beginning Moroccan Colloquial Arabic

Spring 2009

Intensive Moroccan Colloquial Arabic
Beginning Moroccan Colloquial Arabic
Beginning Modern Standard Arabic I
Intermediate Modern Standard Arabic I
Intermediate Modern Standard Arabic II
Intermediate Moroccan Colloquial Arabic

The Arabic language courses (Moroccan Colloquial and Modern Standard Arabic) were coordinated by a language faculty member from the Department of Arabic as a Foreign Language at the Université Mohammed V. During the fall 2008 semester, instructors utilized a local language curriculum developed by Mohammed V instructors for previous foreign student groups. Although students developed a good relationship with the instructors, the feedback on the actual language curriculum and the courses was relatively negative. CIEE responded to student feedback and adjusted the language curriculum for the spring 2009 semester so that it included both the local curriculum and the popular al-Kitaab language textbooks used in Arabic language courses at many U.S. universities and colleges. Although there were fewer complaints about the overall curriculum in spring 2009, the overall language feedback remained rather negative. Classes were small, and there was good interaction between students and instructors. However, CIEE recognizes the need to make adjustments to the curriculum prior to the start of the fall 2009 semester in order to improve the overall quality and student satisfaction with these important language classes. The Arabic language coordinator, CIEE Academic Director, and the instructors met regularly throughout the spring 2009 semester to discuss different strategies and specific curricular issues. Although the first year of Arabic language instruction did not meet CIEE's expectations, the fact that the language coordinator and instructors have been very open to feedback and willing to work in a collaborative manner with CIEE is a positive indication that changes can be effectively introduced in 2009-10.

Although this program does not have a formal CIEE Community Language Commitment, students are encouraged to use their Arabic with staff, homestay families, and local students as much as possible. However, since most students are absolute beginners in Arabic, English (scattered with Arabic) would be spoken instead. Intermediate students sometimes expressed their frustration at not being able to practice Modern Standard Arabic with locals because locals would often assume that as a foreigner, the student spoke French. Locals are also more likely to speak the local dialect of Arabic rather than the Modern Standard Arabic.

Several of the students on the program this year had a solid background in French and were able to speak French daily with staff, local students, and host family members. The majority of the students, however, had little to no background in French and thus struggled with a mixture of Moroccan Colloquial Arabic and French. As mentioned above, CIEE is considering ways to address the language challenges of this program in future semesters, but it is still somewhat difficult to determine whether students on this program are interested in studying Arabic, French, or a combination of the two.

In November 2008, CIEE introduced a Conversation Exchange Partner program for students interested in either Arabic or French language exchange. Local students were matched with CIEE students for weekly language and cultural exchange. Feedback from students was somewhat mixed, although most agreed that this was a good addition to the program and should be continued in the future.

In spring 2009, the CIEE staff created a Peer Language Tutor program. The local Moroccan peer tutors are current M.A. students who were recruited to provide additional language support and assist students with lessons covered in the language classes. Early indications are that these peer language tutors were a positive new program initiative. Several of these peer tutors continued to support CIEE during the 2009 CIEE Rabat Language and Culture Summer Program, providing both language support and assistance with local excursions.

During both fall 2008 and spring 2009, CIEE Arabic language instructors incorporated various field trips and cultural activities into their classes in order to encourage students to use Arabic in practical situations. The teachers invited students to their homes for dinners both semesters. Although students this year were critical of the language courses, they were generally very positive about the teachers who taught the classes.

CIEE Subject Area Courses

The CIEE Rabat Language and Culture program offered students a variety of English and French area studies electives in fall 2008 and spring 2009. These courses were taught by local professors for CIEE students. The CIEE Academic Director taught the required core course, *Contemporary Moroccan Society and Culture*, as well as *Introduction to the Koran*. Here is a complete list of the subject area courses offered by CIEE Rabat this year:

Fall 2008

Contemporary Moroccan Society and Culture (Required)

Electives in English

Business and Economic Issues in the Arab World

Introduction to the Koran

Modern Moroccan Literature: Reflections of Social, Economic, and Political Issues

Electives in French

Race and Ethnicity in Morocco

Morocco, Northern Africa, and France: Political and Historical Perspectives

Spring 2009

Contemporary Moroccan Society and Culture (Required)

Electives in English

Business and Economic Issues in the Arab World

Introduction to the Koran
Organizational Internship (academic year students only)
Gender Issues in Morocco

Electives in French

Morocco, Northern Africa, and France: Political and Historical Perspectives

One of the ongoing challenges for this program is achieving an effective balance between English and French elective courses. Although some students this year indicated a desire to take more courses in French, the Academic Director and other faculty on-site determined that most simply did not have sufficient French skills. As a result, several of the French elective courses were not offered in 2008-09. As the level of French proficiency becomes more evident, CIEE will adjust its semester elective courses and attempt to offer more courses that appeal to both strong French students and those who want to focus more on Arabic language and English elective courses.

Student feedback on the area studies courses varied considerably from course to course and semester to semester. Overall, many students expressed concerns about the lack of adherence by professors to their course syllabi and about the significant differences between the U.S. and Moroccan academic approach. Many professors did not provide students with on-going assessment or regular assignments. Although this is common within a Moroccan academic system, many U.S. students were understandably concerned and wanted more regular feedback on their grades. Adjustments were made in spring 2009 that helped most students to feel more comfortable with their overall academic progress.

Direct Enrollment Courses

CIEE and ESDG continue to discuss the possibility of allowing CIEE students with strong French skills to take one elective course from the regular ESDG curriculum. However, none of the students in 2008-09 were determined to have sufficient French proficiency. Further, as most ESDG courses were offered in the evenings and followed a different academic calendar, it was logistically challenging for CIEE students to directly enroll in ESDG courses.

Out of Classroom Activities

The CIEE core course, *Contemporary Moroccan Society and Culture*, includes several academic excursions, including a popular academic module in Fez and Marrakech each semester. In addition to the longer Fez/Marrakech excursion, some of the area studies courses included guest lectures, local field trips, visits to museums and academic institutions, and meetings with local Moroccan students. This year's students rated the CIEE academic excursions very favorably and commented that the Fez and Marrakech excursion was extremely rewarding and enjoyable.

Fez and Marrakech Excursion

CIEE students and staff spent almost a week exploring Fez and Marrakech each semester. The excursion included student discussions, guest lectures, and film screenings with Moroccan faculty and students. Some of the lectures this year included themes such as "Language Diversity in Morocco," "Human Rights in Morocco," "Preventing a world food crisis," and "Capitalism in Morocco." In addition, students met with local faculty and students to screen and discuss several Moroccan films, explored local markets and historical sites, and toured local museums. In spring 2009, the excursion included a trip to the Ourika Valley and stops at the Ibn Abbad tomb and a Jewish shrine. Students and staff both had very positive things to say about this multi-day excursion in both fall 2008 and spring 2009.

Non-Academic

CIEE Orientation

CIEE staff organized an on-site orientation each semester. The first few days of the orientation were spent discussing the program structure and policies, academic courses, housing, local logistics, gender issues, and health and safety concerns. Students also enrolled in a special two-week Intensive Moroccan Colloquial Arabic course in order to help them develop basic communication skills in the local dialect.

The fall 2008 orientation experienced various logistical problems due to the start of the Ramadan holy month and an ongoing construction project at ESDG. Despite these challenges, many students commented that the orientation allowed them to become familiar with Rabat and learn about various Moroccan cultural issues.

Based on feedback from the fall 2008 student group, CIEE staff enhanced the orientation sessions focusing on gender issues, cultural adaptation, and homestays. In addition, the orientation schedule included more activities and tours focused on the city of Rabat so that students could develop a general familiarity with Rabat before moving into their homestays. Student feedback indicates that the orientation was more effective in spring 2009 than fall 2008.

Cultural Activities/Field Trips

The 2008-09 CIEE students indicated a relatively high degree of satisfaction with the cultural activities and field trips organized by CIEE resident staff. In addition to the multi-day academic and cultural excursion to Fez and Marrakech, CIEE staff organized and led a series of day trips and overnight excursions each semester. They also coordinated some wonderful local cultural activities for the students. Here is a brief summary of the key activities and field trips in fall 2008 and spring 2009:

Volubilis, Meknes and Moulay Driss Excursion:

Meknes, one of the imperial cities in Morocco, was the capital of Morocco under the reign of Moulay Ismail in the 17th century. Students visited the old medina, the underground prison, and the famous Bab al Mansour gate and square. The group also visited Volubilis where students were able to experience the best preserved Roman ruins in Morocco. Afterwards, students traveled to the conservative quiet town of Moulay Driss, where they visited an important pilgrimage site for Muslims.

Asilah Day Trip (fall and spring)

Asilah is a coastal town on the northwest tip of the Atlantic Ocean. This excursion included a tour of the medina, a presentation on the history of Asilah, and free time at the Asilah beach. On the return to Rabat, the group visited the Merdja Zerga National park and took a boat ride on the Blue Lagoon with an ornithologist.

Azrou and Ifrane Day Trip

After the CIEE Fez excursion, students and staff visited the nearby towns of Azrou and Ifrane. Students had the opportunity to observe the Barbary apes in their natural habitat. Ifrane, located in the Middle Atlas region of Morocco, is often referred to as "Little Switzerland." Students visited the Al Akhawayyan University and learned about the development of Ifrane by the French during the Protectorate Era.

Chefchaoune Excursion

Chefchaoune is a scenic town nestled in the Rif Mountains. Students went on a walking tour of the city and ended up at the abandoned mountain-top mosque where they had a beautiful view of the entire town. The CIEE group met with local families and visited their homes in the mountains. On the next day, CIEE staff arranged two optional hikes in the Atlas Mountains, including a shorter hike to an abandoned mosque famous for its slanted Minaret. On the return trip to Rabat, the group stopped at the Laou Gorge.

Moroccan Culture Night

CIEE staff arranged a culture night that replicated many aspects of a traditional Moroccan wedding. Students wore traditional Moroccan attire and enjoyed an evening of live music and non-stop Moroccan food. Students rated this event as one of the most enjoyable and rewarding during both the fall 2008 and spring 2009 semesters.

CIEE Picnic on a Farm outside of Rabat

Students visited a local farm to observe how one family self sustains itself through organic farming. The farm includes pomegranate, orange, lemon, peach and Chinese apple trees along with farm animals. Staff and students had a Moroccan-style barbecue under the trees.

Calligraphy

Calligraphy was held on a weekly basis for those wishing to learn about the history of Islamic Art and put into practice the art of Arabic script.

In addition to these excursions, day trips, and activities, staff arranged Moroccan cooking classes and cultural events at the National Theater. Students also participated in a variety of local festivals throughout the year. The CIEE student buddies helped organize trips to the old medina to practice bargaining in Arabic, a visit to the L'Oudaya (old fortress overlooking the Rabat beach) and to Chellah, the Roman ruins in Rabat. Students, staff, and the CIEE Moroccan student buddies also went by rowboat from Rabat to the nearby town of Sale. Some students also enjoyed trying out the local Turkish baths in Rabat.

Overall, these excursions, field trips, and activities helped students learn firsthand about Moroccan history, culture, and society. Students rated these aspects of the CIEE program very favorably in both fall 2008 and spring 2009, and many commented that they had the opportunity to participate in Moroccan society more as a local resident than as a tourist.

Housing

The CIEE Rabat Language and Culture program offered students two housing options in 2008-09: shared rooms in a local private residence hall or CIEE homestays. Most students opted to live with local Moroccan homestay families, while 2-3 students chose the residence hall. Overall, students were very satisfied with their CIEE homestays and had mixed feelings about the residence hall. Homestays provided students with maximum cultural and language immersion, and many of the students had very positive things to say about their Moroccan families. Students were able to practice Moroccan Arabic and French with the families, joined them for family meals and excursions, attended family weddings, and learned firsthand about Moroccan family life. The traditional communal Friday couscous family meal was a highlight for many students. In fall 2008, students were placed with families in both old traditional neighborhoods (Medina) and newer, modern neighborhoods. In spring 2009, CIEE decided to place students with families in the modern neighborhoods out of concerns for safety and privacy issues in the Medina. In addition, the CIEE Resident Staff were more directly involved in the day-to-day

oversight of the homestay program in spring 2009. This change allowed for better overall support and an improvement in student satisfaction.

Host families are carefully screened carefully by CIEE resident staff in order to make sure that the families are truly interested in cultural exchange, can provide a safe and clean living environment, have a private room for the student, are willing to provide meals throughout the week, and agree not to host students from other programs. During fall 2008, CIEE discovered that a few of the families in the old section of Rabat were hosting students from multiple exchange programs as well as short-term foreign visitors from various countries. This was not a problem in spring 2009 due to the changes in overall CIEE management of the homestay program.

The students who lived in the private student residence hall shared double rooms with Moroccan students. Students had access to kitchenettes for the preparation of meals but had to use a public Laundromat for their laundry. CIEE students were surprised by the strict policies enforced by residence hall staff. These included evening curfews, no alcohol, no smoking, and a strict "room cleanliness" policy with semi-regular room checks. CIEE will continue to offer a limited number of residence hall spaces for women on the program (no male spaces can be offered due to changes in the residence hall admissions policy) but generally recommends homestays to all students. Although some students chose the residence hall believing that it would afford them more flexibility and freedom than the homestays, the opposite was generally true.

Community Engagement and Integration

The CIEE program is designed to provide students with a variety of community engagement, volunteer, and academic internship opportunities. Although there is significant room for improvement in this area, the program did offer students a limited number of volunteer and internship opportunities in 2008-09. Students who participated in these activities gave mixed feedback about their experiences.

For-Credit Internship and Community Service Options

Academic-year students have the option of arranging a for-credit internship during the second semester. This year, two students completed for-credit internship projects in spring 2009. Their host organization was the IAV Agronomic Institute at Institut Hassan II, a major research university located near the CIEE host institution, ESDG. Both students worked on a project involving the planning of a campus park. Unfortunately, students had problems coordinating regular meetings with the internship coordinator and the CIEE Academic Director.

Not-for-Credit Community Service/Volunteer

Three students volunteered with local organizations in Rabat during the 2008-09 academic year. One student volunteered with Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM), an autonomous feminist NGO whose principal objective is the promotion of women's rights and strategic interests. The student helped translate the organization's website from French into English. Two other students volunteered at the IAV horse stables, cleaning the horses and helping teach local children how to handle horses. Students rated these volunteer activities quite positively.

Challenges

Overall, this was a challenging first year for the CIEE Language and Culture program. Many of the logistical challenges were resolved mid-way through the fall 2008 semester and led to significant improvements for the spring 2009 semester. More significant challenges involving the academic program were addressed carefully in fall 2008 and spring 2009, but there are clearly some additional changes that need to occur in advance of the fall 2009 semester.

Academic

The first year of this program revealed many academic challenges, some of which were due to differences between the U.S. and Moroccan academic cultures, and some which were the result of differences in student and resident staff expectations. Student feedback on area studies courses, including the CIEE core course, improved during the spring 2009 semester, and several of the professors were rated favorably by the students. The Arabic language courses, however, received surprisingly negative feedback from both the fall 2008 and spring 2009 student groups. CIEE staff held a meeting with the Arabic language coordinator to discuss the challenges in December 2008. At these meetings, staff and faculty agreed to modify the local curriculum to include a combination of materials produced by the language instructors from the Universite Mohammed V and exercises taken from the al-Kitaab language textbooks used by many U.S. institutions. The spring 2009 language courses also included more opportunities for feedback from students to teachers and new, more interactive lessons. Unfortunately, while the spring 2009 students had more positive things to say about the instructors as individuals, most claimed that the courses did not meet their academic goals. Many students said that they were frustrated with the lack of regular homework assignments and quizzes throughout the semester.

One of the clear challenges of any U.S. study abroad program in Morocco is that students will have different language motivations. Some students will arrive with a strong interest in Arabic, while others will express interest in a more French-focused academic program. Most students will lack significant proficiency in either Arabic or French. During the first year of this program, CIEE attempted to accommodate “all of the above” by offering intensive Arabic language courses and area studies courses in both English and French. Some students arrived on-site with expectations that there would be CIEE French language courses, although none of the CIEE materials suggested this option would exist. Further, many students lacked the French skills necessary to do academic reading and writing assignments in French. CIEE will attempt to adjust the courses and improve the Arabic instruction in 2009-10, but there are no plans to offer French language courses for credit in the near future.

Non-Academic

Students were generally satisfied with the CIEE co-curricular opportunities, including local and regional field trips, the academic excursion to Fez and Marrakech, and the CIEE homestays. Most of the logistical and organizational problems mentioned by students in fall 2008 were resolved before the start of the spring 2009 semester, leading to a much more successful overall program.

Students had relatively negative feedback about the host institution due to its small size and lack of major university facilities. CIEE maintains a study center office in ESDG, and students have access to wireless internet. However, the ESDG library is very small, and there are limited printing capabilities. CIEE bought a new printer in fall 2008 to help address the printing problems and reminded students that they have access to the national library in Rabat for any research needs. Some students clearly arrived in Rabat with the expectation that they would be studying on a major university campus. CIEE will address these concerns in future print and

web materials in order to help avoid any confusion in the future. Further, CIEE is exploring ways to expand its connections to local universities in order to give students more interaction with local university students and more access to campus facilities.

CIEE Rabat staff and students agreed that there were not enough volunteer activities in 2008-09. Staff are meeting with various organizations during summer 2009 in order to improve this aspect of the program next year. The introduction of graduate-level language peer tutors and Moroccan buddies helped spring 2009 students feel more integrated into local student life while also providing them with additional language and cultural support.

Future Directions

CIEE is actively working to improve various aspects of the academic program for fall 2009. Meetings held in Rabat during summer 2009 have resulted in changes that should allow the Arabic language courses to improve significantly in 2009-10. This includes the replacement of some instructors with new instructors who have more direct teaching experience with Americans and/or actual experience living in the U.S. The curriculum concerns will be addressed through regular monitoring of classes by the Arabic language coordinator and CIEE Academic Director. Instructors have agreed to follow a more continuous-assessment model in their classes and include more regular homework assignments and quizzes so that students can gauge their academic progress more easily throughout the semester.

While student feedback on the area studies courses was generally positive this year, new faculty have been invited to teach some of the courses next year. This is based on both student feedback and CIEE staff observations. The Academic Director will meet with faculty prior to the start of the fall 2009 semester in order to discuss U.S. student expectations and U.S. academic culture so that faculty can start the semester with more realistic expectations about students, particularly around issues involving French language proficiency, the need for more continuous assessment, and the importance of adhering to course syllabi. CIEE plans to add at least one new elective course option in spring 2010.

CIEE will attempt to expand its access to local university facilities for fall 2009 and beyond. The goal is to offer some of the area studies courses at the local universities. Several of the current CIEE faculty have indicated that this should be possible and have also offered to invite their local Moroccan degree students to participate in various class discussions. Through this process, CIEE should be able to provide students with a more suitable overall academic experience and improved integration with university campus activities.

CIEE Rabat staff plan to continue exploring ways to increase student integration and peer language support. Many of the improvements made during spring 2009 will be enhanced further in fall 2009. This includes increased interaction between students and the CIEE Peer Language tutors and local Moroccan student buddies, the introduction of new volunteer opportunities, and improvements to the on-site orientation.

Finally, CIEE successfully launched a new Rabat Language and Culture Summer program in summer 2009. Early indications are that the students are satisfied with the various academic and co-curricular aspects of the program. With each new semester, the CIEE Rabat program has taken positive steps forward. All indications point to a much improved and more rewarding experience for students in fall 2009.